

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

THE WHITE THROATED FORM OF THE PIED WHEATEAR *OENANTHE PLESCHANKA* IN KENYA
 On 25 November 1978 DJP, together with G.J. Jobson, watched, near Sultan Hamud, a dark-backed wheatear *Oenanthe* sp. with dark cheeks, an otherwise pale head and whitish underparts. On closer examination this bird was identified as a first-year male Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka*. The flight feathers, wing coverts and tertials were blackish-brown, and the underwing dark. The mantle was also blackish-brown with some paler feather edgings visible. The crown and nape were pale greyish-brown. The lores and ear coverts were blackish-brown, and there was blackish at the sides of the upper breast, near the bend of the closed wing. A blackish mark was also visible at the side of the neck, at the rear border of the throat, but the throat itself was white. The extensive white rump, very limited amount of black in the outer tail feather tips, and (compared with *O. oenanthe*) the longish tail, light build and 'weak' legs were consistent with the identification as *pleschanka*, as was the bird's preference for perching 4 - 5 m up in Acacia trees.

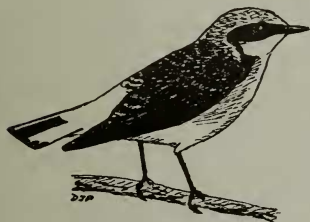


Fig.1 White throated form of *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Ngulia Lodge, 27 November 1978

On 27 November 1978, during a particularly large and varied fall of migrants at Ngulia Lodge, seven wheatears were caught at the lights at night. Two of these were typical *O. pleschanka*; another first-year male, identified as *pleschanka* was typical in all respects except that its throat was white. The Ngulia bird (Fig.1) appeared identical to the Sultan Hamud example except that the trace of black on the sides of the neck was reduced; the axillaries and underwing coverts were blackish. The wing measured 94 mm and the tarsus 23 mm. The bill, legs and toes were weaker than in *O. oenanthe* (this is always quite noticeable in *pleschanka* in the hand), and the weight, 14.3 g, was in the typical Ngulia range for *pleschanka*. We were able to discount the possibility that some other Palearctic species was involved. The Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica* requires comment here since it is of similar size to *pleschanka*, with a similar rump and tail pattern and a blackish underwing; moreover, it commonly has a white throat. The Ngulia bird was not *hispanica*, however, because *hispanica* has a pale mantle, uniform with the top of the head. Also, the black on the face did not extend up on to the forehead and above the eye as is usual in the race of *hispanica* (*melanoleuca*) which visits northeast Africa.

The white throated form is evidently unusual in the Pied Wheatear, it is not mentioned in the standard European field guides, and does not seem to have been noted previously in the Ethiopian region. However, it is known to occur rarely in both male and female birds (Witherby et al. 1943, Vaurie 1959, Húe & Etchécopar 1970). Certainly it must be taken into account if any unusual pale throated wheatear is seen in East Africa.

REFERENCES

- HÚE, F. & ETCHÉCOPAR, R.D. 1970. *Les oiseaux du proche et du moyen orient*. Paris: Boubee.
- VAURIE, C. 1959. *The birds of the Palearctic fauna [Order Passeriformes]*. London: Witherby.

WITHERBY, H.F., JOURDAIN, F.C.R., TICEHURST, N.F. & TUCKER, B.W. 1943. *The Handbook of British birds*. 2nd impression. London: Witherby.

D.J. Pearson, Department of Biochemistry, Box 30197, Nairobi
G.C. Backhurst, Box 24702, Nairobi.

Received 10 May 1979.

RED-THROATED PIPIT *ANTHUS CERVINUS* AT NDOLA, ZAMBIA On 18 March 1979 at 17:30 I flushed a pipit *Anthus* sp. from short-grassed ground near a waterlogged area at the edge of Itawa swamps, Ndola (12°57'S, 27°47'E). My attention was drawn to the bird by its call on rising - a high-pitched rather metallic and not very loud single *see*, and by its markedly undulating flight. The bird flew for about 20 m, not rising more than 3 m above the ground. I flushed it about ten times, and each time it flew only a short distance before landing, either on a bare lump of earth or in grass. It did not run, and was only flushed on close approach. Eventually it flew into longer grass in a wetter area where it was impossible to see on the ground.

Excellent views of it on the ground and in flight were had through 10x glasses. It was smaller than a Plain-backed or Richard's Pipit (*A. leucophrys* or *A. novae-seelandiae*) both of which were present. The upperside, including crown and nape, was brown with broad dark centres to the feathers giving a heavily-streaked effect. The remiges and retrices were similar in colour to the back. In flight the rump was seen to be streaked. Pale edges to the greater and median wing coverts produced two pale lines across the folded wing. The superciliary stripe was broad and well-defined above and behind the eye, narrower and poorly-defined in front. The lores and ear-coverts were plain brown, rather dark, with a pale line below them and a more diffuse pale rear border to the ear coverts. The malar streak was well-defined and blackish. The underside had heavy black streaking in the form of large elongated spots beginning abruptly at the base of the throat and extending down the breast and all along the flanks below the folded wings; at least two lines of spots were visible along each flank. The spots were close together and some appeared to almost run into each other. The belly and under-tail coverts were white and unmarked. Chin and throat were unmarked and washed with buff, slightly pink, which extended over the spotted area of the breast and some way along the flanks, and also coloured the pale areas on the face and the superciliary stripe. Outer tail feathers were white.

The eye was dark, bill rather short and fine and appeared darkish, the legs were pale, the exact shade not determined. The bird called twice, the second time a slightly longer *seez* of the same pitch and quality as the first. Stance was not so upright as that of Richard's Pipit.

Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* were in the same area on 18th. Heavy rain began at Ndola at 19:00 on 18th and continued for over 12 h. Neither the pipit nor the wagtails were present in the late afternoon of 19th at Itawa.

I am familiar with all the pipits which are known in Zambia and also with all the western Euroean species except *cervinus*. I sent a description and sketch of the bird to P.L. Britton, R.J. Dowsett, D.J. Pearson and D.I.M. Wallace, all of whom agree (*in litt.*) that it was *cervinus*. This species has not been recorded before from Zambia, and indeed Moreau (1972) gives its wintering range in East Africa only to northern Tanzania. P.L. Britton and D.J. Pearson (*in litt.*) give the most southerly East African records: Morogoro (6°50'S, 37°40'E) and Kilosa (6°50'S, 37°00'E) in the east and from Queen Elizabeth Park, Uganda in the west, where it is rare.

The Ndola record was some 1400 km south of Queen Elizabeth Park and 1200 km southwest of Kilosa. The habitat of light grass with cattle-trampled patches of mud was typical for the species in Africa (Moreau 1972).

P.B. Taylor, Box 415, Ndola, Zambia

Received 3 August 1979